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AUTHOR Frankel, Daniel G.; Roer-Bornstein, Dorit
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ABSTRACT

An investigation was conducted to better understand the interaction between physical and social settings, culturally based customs for parenting, and the ideology of caretakers in two Israeli cultures undergoing modernization. Yemenite and Kurdish parenting systems were examined by observing mother/infant interactions in unstructured naturalistic settings. Participating were a total of 16 Yemenite and 16 Kurdish mothers with infants 6 and 9 months of age; subjects resided in relatively homogeneous Israeli villages that were supportive of tradition. Observations were made at 15-second intervals for 45 minutes on several variables, including visual, vocal, tactual-kinesthetic, affective-expressive, and object-oriented behaviors. Traditionally, Yemenites have emphasized emotional support and intellectual growth for infants, while Kurdish people have emphasized motor and physical growth, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. Findings indicate that after 30 years of a common modernization experience, the Yemenite and Kurdish communities still exhibit significant differences in mother/infant interactions. These differences are largely congruent with traditional differences in infant rearing ideologies. In general, it was concluded that culture and tradition markedly affect parenting behavior even in societies undergoing drastic change. Further, results suggested that customs understandable within a modern ideology may be the ones that are retained. (RH)

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MODERNIZATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE INTERACTION OF SETTING, CUSTOM, AND IDEOLOGY

Daniel G. Frankel

Hebrew University/Bowman Gray School of Medicine

Dorit Roer-Bornstein

University of North Carolina

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First author's address: Child Guidance Clinic, 1200 Glade St., Winston-Salem, NC 27101.

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In recent years there has been a renewed interest in the cultural variability of child development. Concern has been directed at ways that the environment may promote various developmental dispositions. The environment has been characterized as a niche which Super and Harkness (1983) describe as an organized and self-regulating system consisting of: 1)the physical and social setting; 2)the culturally-based customs for parenting; and 3)the ideology of the caretakers. Modernization has required significant change in the developmental dispositions that need to be encouraged for optimal adjustment to a culture that is rapidly changing. Modernization represents a dramatic change in the social and physical setting and it has led to a profound change in the parenting system. An analysis of the impact of modernization, especially across different cultures, may promote understanding of ways co-ordination/regulation is established between setting, custom, and ideology.

Previously we reported a study of the modernization of infant rearing ideologies in which we traced traditional and modern influences on contemporary values of Kurdish and Yemenite Jews living in Israel (Frankel & Roer-Bornstein, 1982). Old women and young women were asked a series of questions concerning pregnancy, delivery and early development. Both ethnic communities immigrated to Israel approximately 30 years ago. The traditions of the two communities differed markedly. The Yemenite tradition had

emphasized intellectual growth while the Kurdish had emphasized motor and physical growth. During the past 30 years both communities were exposed to very similar expressions of modernistic values: they read the same newspapers, listened to the same radio programs, went to schools with similar curriculae, and served in a common army. The conditions for comparing cultural changes seemed to us to be very advantageous for limiting some of the variance due to confounds of different traditions interacting with different expressions of modernity.

To better understand the interaction of setting, custom, and ideology, in the present study we examined Yemenite and Kurdish parenting systems by observing mother-infant interactions in unstructured naturalistic settings. Sixteen Yemenite and 16 Kurdish mothers were observed with 6-month and 9-month old infants. During 15 second time intervals across 45 minutes, the presence/absence of initiation/response of visual, vocal, tactual/kinesthetic, affective-expressive, and object-oriented behaviors were coded. The samples were limited to women who lived in relatively homogeneous villages that have been supportive of the tradition. For the present samples, there were no significant differences between Yemenites and Kurds for mother age, mother education, number of mothers working, father age, father education, number of siblings in home, and sex of infant.

Before reviewing some of the preliminary analyses of the observational data, we would like to summarize some of the more striking differences between the traditional Yemenite and Kurdish infant-rearing ideologies. These comments are based on our interviews with individuals born and raised in the country of origin and ehtnographic works and travel journals written in the 19th and early 20th centuries. From these sources it would appear that while the extended family constituted an important social unit for both Yemenites and Kurds and while infants were cared for by multiple caretakers in both societies, it was among the Yemenites that the mother-infant relationship was expected to be the primary emotional bond of the infant's life. This relationship was expected to be intimate, expressed in physical proximity and much physical affectionate contact even during the earliest neonatal stages. Yemenite tradition also required caregivers to provide many forms of what we would today call psychological stimulation. The infant was supposed to be played with and made to laugh because this "would open its mind." Massages were supposed to make the baby "clever." The infant also was supposed to be sung to and talked to. For the Kurds, on the other hand, the rigors of an agrarian way of life in Kurdistan seem to have corresponded with a primary emphasis on the physical viability and robustness of the infant. In Kurdistan, infancy seems to have been in many respects a time of extended gestation--for at least

half a year the infant was swaddled in a crib that afforded fulfillment of most if not all physical needs without removal of the infant from the crib. Social interaction was not emphasized and concerns with environmental impact on infant functioning were limited to promoting faster motor development, i.e. using a walker.

For the present paper, we limit findings to main effects for Kurdish/Yemenite comparisons. The present findings indicate behavioral differences that accord well with different traditional attitudes. The differential emphasis on the social component of the mother-infant relationship has been maintained. For the present samples, Yemenite mothers were significantly more likely to hold their infants than were the Kurdish mothers; the Kurds were more likely to place their infant on the floor. This difference was not due to a difference in the proximity of mother and infant since there was no significant difference in the likelihood of mother and infant occupying the same room. Yemenite mothers and infants also were more likely to be engaged in reciprocal interaction, in other words to be observed in a dyadic gaze, in a dyadic vocal dialogue, and in episodes of mutual smiling. Intergroup differences in rates of development do not seem to account for the differences in behavioral interactions; while Yemenite infants smiled at their mothers and at other family members more than did Kurdish infants, the likelihood of smiling to the observer, an unfamiliar

adult, did not differ. In similar fashion, while Yemenite babies were more likely to look at the examiner or at a family member other than the mother, the likelihood of a fixation of some source of inanimate stimulation did not differ. In sum, behavioral differences were limited to environmental contexts that are likely to reflect differential cultural conditioning. Different traditional emphases on other forms of stimulation were maintained in other contemporary interactive behaviors as well. Yemenite mothers were significantly more likely to play verbal and laughter-inducing games. And, while the main effect did not obtain significance because mothers of 6-month old infants of both ethnic groups were not observed to engage in games that promote motoric development, it is striking that the interaction was significant, namely that Kurdish mothers of 9-month old infants did engage in such motoric games more often than did Yemenite mothers of 9-month old infants. Parenthetically, we would like to mention that a third group of Moroccans is currently being studied in order to better clarify the interaction of ideology and behavior.

The results of the present study indicate that after 30 years of a common modernization experience, the Yemenite and Kurdish communities evidence significant differences in mother-infant interactions. These differences are largely congruent with traditional differences in infant-rearing ideologies. None of the significant differences reviewed in the paper are in opposition to differences in the ideologies and well over 90% are in accord with predictions we made on the basis of our familiarity

with the traditions (in some cases such as play with food we could not make a prediction). The present results thus indicate that culture and tradition markedly affect parenting behavior even in societies undergoing drastic change. These results confirm findings of Caudill (1978) and others who investigated change in Japan. The Israeli setting, though, affords a cross-cultural comparison in which the expression of modernity does not vary with and depend upon and hence reflect the traditional culture.

The demonstration of the impact of tradition does not indicate an absence of change. While we have no base-line of systematic observations of mother-infant interaction in the country of origin, we infer that interaction is likely to have changed greatly. For both Yemenites and Kurds, recent years are likely to have seen increasing responsibility for caregiving on the part of the mother. Toys that are common today were unknown in the past. And for both groups, verbal stimulation is likely to have increased. Historians, sociologists, and anthropologists have typically analyzed ways that custom and ideology represent adaptations to social and economic structural variables. The present data indicate, however, that ideological variables mediate the impact of the social and physical setting and that change in custom and practice can be affected by the structure of ideology. Behavioral differences conformed not only to differences in ideology but also to differences

in what we have elsewhere (1982) hypothesized as a differential receptivity on the part of different traditional ideologies to modernistic ideologies. In particular, we have suggested that the Yemenite tradition was especially predisposed to psychological explanation and conceptualization while the Kurdish tradition was especially predisposed to biological explanation and conceptualization of behavior and development. In the past ten years, through the efforts of well-baby clinics that serve most of the population, members of both ethnic communities have been intensively and extensively exposed to the belief that infants require cognitive, verbal, emotional, and motor stimulation. Nonetheless, in spite of similar contact with such Western beliefs, it is the Yemenites who maintain greater interest in interaction that promotes social and cognitive development and the Kurds who maintain the greater interest in interaction that promotes physical autonomy and strength.

We have suggested that ideology influences the evolution of custom that accompanies significant change in physical/social setting. In many cases, however, it has been suggested that ideology functions as a post-hoc rationale (see LeVine, 1973). Our observations of the modernization of Kurds and Yemenites suggest that even if ideology changes in order to maintain practice, that is, in order to rationalize a practice, ideology serves an important role in re-establishing the regulation of the parenting

niche. We have found, for example, that as in the past, Yemenites continue to sleep in near proximity to infants while Kurdish mothers continue to sleep not only in separate beds but currently in separate bedrooms. In the past, these practices were explained on the basis of tradition, i.e. "such is the way one is supposed to behave." In the present, members of both ethnic groups justify their behavior with psychological reasoning. The Kurds suggest that the separation helps to avoid spoiling the baby and teaching the baby to be overly demanding while the Yemenites suggest that sleeping near the mother facilitates emotional security. It is notable that the modern ideology that ahs been assimilated by each culture is continuous with traditional ideas. It is the Yemenites who emphasize emotional support while it is the Kurds who emphasize autonomy and self-sufficiency. Such results suggest that customs that can be understood within a modern ideology may be the ones that are retained. Both for Kurds and Yemenites many customs that were predicated on a magical/spiritual theory of development have not withstood the leap of faith to modern belief structures. In short, the present findings indicate that the role of ideology in regulating the parenting niche is significant even if the ideology seems only to act as a post-hoc rationale, that is, to influence what behaviors one ignores or attends to as an expression of accepted ideology and to influence what kinds of interpretations one places on a particular behavior in order to

make it consistent with the wider ideology. It may be such latter functions of ideology that help clarify why certain developmental dispositions--modernistic goals--are not tightly linked to specific behaviors but instead are associated with general parenting perspectives--child-oriented psychological perspectives--that are deployed across the years of growth of the child.

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